No. 87.

A WORD OF WARNING FOR THE SICK SOLDIER.

It is bad to be sick, worse to be sinful, and worst of all to be impenitent. Sin is a disease, a moral disease, a disease of the inner man. What sickness is to the body, sin is to the soul. It is the worst of all maladies, more loathsome than the leprosy, more painful than the gout, more stupifying than paralysis, more maddening than fever, more fatal than consumption, and more dreadful than all these combined. Other diseases are arrested by the tomb; but sin kills beyond the tomb—destroys both soul and body in hell. Matt. 10, 28.

You, my friend, are infected with this fearful malady. You inherited it from your parents. You were shapen in iniquity, and in sin did your mother conceive you. Psa. 57, 5. You belong to a degenerate, corrupt race, to a world lying in sin. Eph. 2, 1; 1 John, 5, 19. The symptoms of your moral disease are numerous and unmistakable. Profanity, drunkenness, lewdness, dishonesty, lying, murder, and such vices, are clear signs that the disease, not only exists, but is raging. But there are other marks of it equally potent and decisive. The Word of God is the spiritual food which he has furnished for the nourishment and growth of his children. 1 Peter, 2, 2. A lack of appetite for this food is an alarming symptom of moral disorder. Not to de-

sire the "sincere milk of the word," betokens a heart estranged from God, and a taste vitiated by sin. Prayer is the healthful breathing of a child of God. If it is neglected or performed in a heartless, formal manner, the proof of a serious moral disease is unquestionable. The prayerless soul is dead in trespasses and sins. As a general emaciation and feebleness of the body are certain symptoms of its disease, so a habitual neglect of religious privileges and duties furnish positive evidence of an unhealthy and perilous condition of the soul. And now, my friend, examine yourself, deal faithfully with your soul. Do you not find in your conduct, words, inclinations, and thoughts, proofs of your moral disease? Does not conscience testify that you are estranged from God, enslaved by your lusts, and degraded by your evil habits? I may apply to you the words of the prophet, in a sense different from that in which he used them, "The whole head is sick; and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." A conviction that you are diseased is indispensable to your healing. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." As only the man that is conscious of his disease, consults a medical adviser, so only they that are convinced of their sinfulness, guilt and danger, seek the aid of the Physician of souls. I ask again, my friend, are you not diseased? Are you prepared for death, judgment and eternity? Do you not, impenitent man, bear plain marks of a moral malady—the fearful tokens of a coming perdition?

God has employed appropriate means for the cure of your moral sickness. It may be that you were nursed in the lap of piety; even taught in your infancy to lisp the name of Jesus, and to seek his mercy, were brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and were led to the family altar, morning and evening, to present to God your sacrifices of prayer and praise. To you every successive sabbath brought its sacred associations and its precious privi-

leges. In the Sunday School you were taught to read the Scriptures, and its life-giving doctrine was instilled into your susceptible minds. Or, if you were not so highly favored in your childhood, you have, at least, enjoyed many opportunities of hearing the gospel preached, and of seeing its happy effects on those who embrace it. Your christian friends have cherished a tender concern for your salvation, have prayed for you, and have warned you of your danger, and urged you to flee to Christ, with all the fervor of love, and all the eloquence of tears. God's providential dealings have concurred with the ministrations of His gospel in pressing you to attend to your salvation. "The riches of His goodness, and forbearance and long suffering," were designed, as they were adapted, to lead you to repentance; and his judgments were sent to warn, arouse and save you. Rom. 2, 4; Isa. 26, 9.

All the means that God has employed for your conversion have proved unavailing. You may have been, in some degree, convinced of the truth of Christianity, and of its transcendent importance; may have been impressed with your danger and with your need of mercy; may have been almost persuaded to be a christian; and may, like Herod when he heard John the Baptist, have done "many things," (Mark, 6, 20); but still you are impenitent, and enslaved by sin. Your goodness, like the morning cloud or the early dew has passed away, leaving you more insensible, and more firmly set in your course of folly and sin, than you were before. Your good resolutions and solemn vows have been broken, and are either forgotten, or are remembered with shame. It is of the Lord's mercy that you have not been consumed. There are many, no doubt, this moment in perdition less corrupt and guilty than you are.

But God, my friend, has not yet given you up. He still waits to be gracious, still employs means for your conversion. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground," but sent of God, always in wisdom, and frequently in mercy. God has brought this sickness upon you. Far from home, and home comforts,

and dear kindred, and sanctuary privileges, which once you prized so lightly, among strangers, and surrounded with the sick and dying, you are now tortured with disease, and doomed to pass wearisome and anxious days and nights. It is a sore trial, and deeply do I sympathize with you in it. But this sickness, I trust, is not unto death, but for the glory of God. It is a pause in your career of thoughtfulness, dissipation and vice. God is calling you anew to repentance and salvation. It is a great pity that you did not attend to the interests of your soul while you enjoyed health and religious opportunities. It is a great mercy that God did not call you to judgment while your heart was cheering you in the days of your youth, and you were walking in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes. Eccl. 11, 9. It is a great mercy that you may on your sick couch, and in your feebleness, and amid the groans and confusion of a hospital, obtain salvation. The Scriptures record one instance of late conversion, that no sinner need to despair of salvation; and they record but one, that no sinner should presume to defer his repentance. The dying thief stands as a solitary trophy of grace, in the inspired history of the church, a plea alike against despair and against presumption. Sickness is not without its religious advantages. It lulls the storm of passion, bridles the unholy lusts, suspends the course of sin, strips the world of its delusive charms, affords time for reflection, quickens the benumbed consciene, gives glimpses of a coming eternity, and a righteous judgment, and teaches the necessity of divine mercy. Many have attributed their conversion, through grace, to sickness. In health and prosperity, they were gay, thoughtless, stout-hearted, and far from righteousness; but on the bed of langor and pain, they considered their ways, and turned to God.

What will be the effect of this sickness on you, my friend, remains to be seen. You may slight this kind warning as you have the twice ten thousand mercies, of your past life. You may grow harder and more determined in sin, in proportion as God employs means for your salvation. This

affliction, suited to quicken you to reflection, and lead you to the cross, may be perverted to the increase of your corruption and guilt. This bodily suffering that you endure may be but the precursor of the pangs of "the eternal death." But I hope better things of you though I thus write. Calling to remembrance your neglected privileges, your broken vows, and your multiplied sins, considering the value and peril of your soul, and your brief and uncertain day of grace, you will, it is to be hoped, pay instant, earnest attention to the business of salvation.

If you would be a Christian, the first requisite is *decision of purpose.* Whatever else you may have, you cannot be saved without this. Indecision is one of the greatest barriers to the salvation of sinners. Many are convinced that it is their duty and interest to be Christians, and make fitful, feeble efforts to follow their conviction; but, lacking a deep and settled purpose, they fall short of the prize. If, my friend, you would be saved, your mind must be fully made up, at any sacrifice, and through any difficulty and peril, to secure the great deliverance. An object so glorious may well challenge all the resolution, firmness and energy of which you are susceptible.

"What if the gospel bid you strive,
With flesh, and sense, and sin?
The prize is most divinely bright
That you are called to win."

You cannot succeed in any difficult earthly enterprise without a firm purpose; but mountains are levelled and gulfs are bridged, by this invincible spirit. If this disposition is needful in secular, much more in religious pursuits. He that would enter in at the strait or difficult gate must strive or agonize. Luke xiii, 24. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. Luke, ix, 62. I would entreat you then by the value of your soul, by the love of Christ, by the bloody sacrifice of the cross, and by the solemnities of judg-

ment and of eternity, to make up your mind, by God's help, that you will become a Christian, or die in the attempt.

But be sure, my friend, that you *do not stop short of the cross.* There is neither help nor hope for any sinner but in the cross. Whatever you may do, or suffer, or purpose, all will be unavailing, and worse than unavailing, if you do not come to Christ. Neither tears, prayers, vows, alms, penances, profession, nor martyrdom, nor all these combined, can save a soul. "None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good;" and he can do them good. His blood can cleanse them from sin, his love can cheer them, his wisdom can guide them, his power can support them under every burden, and his grace can crown them with glory. "It hath pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell." A bleeging, dying Christ is the only comfort of a sin-stricken world. But in order that you may share in the benefits that Christ bestows, you must receive Him as your Prophet, Priest and King. Faith, which is equivalent to coming to Christ or receiving him, is the condition on which God bestows eternal life, and all the blessings requisite to its enjoyment, on sinners. "Jesus said unto the Jews, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." John, vi, 35.

Do you, my friend, fear to commit your soul to the hands of Jesus? I am not surprised that you should be ready to despair of salvation. When you consider with how high a hand you have sinned against God, through how many years you have persisted in your rebellion, under what aggravating circumstances you have maintained the unnatural conflict, and the fatal influence of your example upon your fellow beings, it is not strange that your guilt should seem to transcend the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood, and the riches of His forgiving grace. When we contemplate God as a holy, just and sin-avenging Judge, terror not hope fills our minds, punishment not pardon is what we expect. He is not only a just God but a Saviour; and you, polluted, guilty, miserable sinner, need not despair of salvation.

Your guilt is great, greater than you have ever conceived: but it does not exceed the cleansing power of Christ's blood. Your soul is triple dyed in sin, but the blood of Christ can wash out its deepest stains. The words of the Apostle John are fraught with everlasting consolation and encouragement to sin-burdened and desponding souls, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son cleanseth us from all sin." Christ is not only able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, but he is ready to receive the coming sinner, without delay, and without upbraiding. "All that the Father giveth me," he says, "shall come to me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. John vi, 37.

It only remains that I should urge you, my sick friend, to come to Jesus. Suppose your sickness should prove fatal. I trust it will not, but it may. At any rate the day cannot be very remote when disease, or old age, or some casualty will bring you to your end. And what a fearful thing it is to die without the hope of the gospel. You would better never have been born, or been born in a heathen land, or born a beast, than to live and die in sin. You are not prepared for death, and you know it. You would not die in your present state for ten thousand worlds; and yet you are pursuing a course, which, if you persist in it, must terminate in an eternity of bitter regrets, unutterable woe, unavailing lamentations, and black despair. Is it wise, is it not madnesss in the extreme, to hazard your eternal well-being on the chance of your recovery from sickness?

Suppose your sickness, as I hope may be the case, should not end in death, but that your health should be restored, and long years of prosperity should be allotted to you! For this exemption from death you will be indebted to the forflearance and tender mercy of God. And will you, dare you, requite the divine goodness with the base ingratitude of perverting it into a motive for continuing in sin? Perish the the thought! If this sickness should be the means of your conversion, you will have cause of eternal gratitude to God. You will number this affliction, though now so bitter and so depressing, among the most cherished bless-

ings of your life. The gloomy hospital, the wearisome couch, the loneliness of your condition, and, it may be, this little tract, associated with your reflection, penitence, prayer and hope, will be classed with your most precious memorials. You will come forth from your affliction, with renewed vigor and fresh hope, better fitted to bear the ills, fulfill the responsibilities, and enjoy the blessings of life. You will be a better soldier, more patient under discipline in the camp, and more courageous amid the dangers of the battle field. When the war closes, if God should preserve your life, you will return to your home to be a blessing to your family, an ornament to society, and a pillar in the church of God. Blessings will attend you through all the journey of life. Useful labors will fill up the measure of your days, and peace will be the nightly pillow for your head. You will finish your course with joy, have an abundant entrance ministered you into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and receive the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give you in that day. May God grant you this mercy for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.